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Statement

U.S. Department of Agriculture • Office of Public Affairs

**by Secretary of Agriculture Edward Madigan on the Serious
Implications of the Current Nationwide Rail Strike Washington, D.C.
June 25, 1992**

The effect of a prolonged rail strike threatens farmers with plummeting prices for farm products and consumers with higher food prices, especially for fruits and vegetables. Farmers are highly dependent on railroads for the movement of corn, wheat, soybeans, oats and sorghum. More than 40 percent of all grain is shipped by rail to exports points, whether it's Muscatine, Moline or Memphis. It's even more critical for wheat, where 61 percent is shipped by rail to export points, primarily the Texas Gulf Coast.

If freight trains aren't running the markets will fall, overseas customers will turn to other suppliers and farmers will lose market share. This poses a jolt to U.S. agriculture at a time when our agricultural exports are expected to be the second highest in history at \$41 billion.

The effect of an extended strike will spread quickly to the pork and broiler industry in the Southeast and to livestock feeding operations in the Midwest and Great Plains. Fruit and vegetable growers in the West face the prospect of East-bound produce rotting in Kansas City or Chicago freight yards, causing tens of millions of dollars in losses.

Without rail transportation, farmers are threatened by staggering losses, ranging into the hundreds of millions of dollars. The strike must be resolved now.

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News Releases

U.S. Department of Agriculture • Office of Public Affairs

CORN EAR PROVIDES SOURCE OF AFLATOXIN RESISTANCE

WASHINGTON, June 25—An ear of corn picked from a south Georgia field in 1980 has yielded a new source of aflatoxin resistance—a discovery that eventually should bode well for corn producers.

Corn grown from the 1980 kernels had 60 percent less aflatoxin than susceptible kernels during more than 10 years of tests, said Neil W. Widstrom, a plant geneticist with the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Agricultural Research Service. Aflatoxin, a potent carcinogen, is produced by the fungus *Aspergillus flavus*, usually during hot, dry weather.

"This is a significant reduction in aflatoxin," said Widstrom. "It will provide corn breeders with an excellent source of germplasm for breeding aflatoxin resistance into future hybrids."

In April, USDA and the University of Georgia released the aflatoxin-resistant corn germplasm—officially called GT-MAS:gk—for commercial breeding.

Aflatoxin resistance is important because federal rules specify that raw grains or finished products cannot be sold across state lines for human consumption or animal feed if they contain 20 parts per billion or more of aflatoxin.

Widstrom said GT-MAS:gk was released as germplasm and isn't available to farmers for immediate planting. "Breeders will have to take the germplasm and incorporate the resistance into inbred lines to develop hybrids that could be sold to farmers," he said.

Plants grown from the GT-MAS:gk germplasm mature in about 110 to 115 days. They are most suitable for planting in the warmer conditions of the southern states. Yield varies from good to moderate, Widstrom said, because the germplasm wasn't bred for genetic uniformity—meaning size, height and other traits often vary from plant to plant. He said about 10 seed companies have already asked for samples of GT-MAS:gk.

Corn, peanuts, cottonseed, some tree nuts and a few other crops are susceptible to the aflatoxin-producing fungus. High temperature and moisture loss are among the chief factors that increase the chance that the fungus can infect and spread in plants. Those factors are common in the southern states, Widstrom said.

Widstrom, based at the ARS Insect Biology and Population Management Research Lab in Tifton, Ga., said the original ear found in 1980 “came from corn grown for livestock feed, but the new germplasm could be bred into corn for human consumption as well.”

Widstrom and colleagues found the corn ear in the Georgia Coastal Plain area near Tifton, during aflatoxin surveys that began in 1977. “We don’t know what hybrid it is, its parentage or genetic background,” he said. “The landowner didn’t know because he was renting the land and didn’t know where the farmer got the seed.”

When the researchers discovered the ear, they noticed that the kernels made the ear look like a checkerboard. Scientists planted the kernels after dividing them into three groups according to color and contamination by *A. flavus* spores. The group most heavily infested with *A. flavus* died. Of the other two, one was susceptible to the fungus and the second—the GT-MAS:gk kernels—was resistant.

The scientists then grew those two groups side by side during 1981-85 field tests. Widstrom said each plant was physically infected with the aflatoxin fungus to measure the plants’ resistance.

The results confirmed what researchers saw on the original ear in 1980: the resistant GT-MAS:gk kernels had an average of only 258 parts per billion of aflatoxin, while the susceptible group averaged 663 ppb, he said.

“Those levels are far higher than you would find under normal field conditions because we physically infected each plant with the fungus,” Widstrom said. “The key is that the resistant corn had less than half of the aflatoxin contamination found in the susceptible corn.”

Seed companies have already begun working with two other aflatoxin-resistant corn lines released over the last several years by ARS and the Mississippi Agricultural and Forestry Experiment Station. Widstrom said the key difference between GT-MAS:gk and the Mississippi lines is that the latter are “inbreds—they’re genetically uniform in terms of size, color and other traits. By contrast, plants grown from the GT-MAS:gk germplasm will vary in terms of maturity, height and other characteristics.”

Sean Adams (301) 504-9108

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NEW REPORTING PROCEDURES FOR UNMARKETED BURLEY AND FLUE-CURED TOBACCOS

WASHINGTON, June 26—The U.S. Department of Agriculture announced today that producers of 1992 and subsequent crops of burley and flue-cured tobacco must report carryover tobacco in excess of 500 pounds that they intend to destroy.

“This report will be made to USDA’s county Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service offices,” said Keith Bjerke, ASCS administrator. “Moreover, the report of unmarketed tobacco must be made prior to its disposition or destruction.”

Bjerke said that for the past few marketing years there has been considerable concern that tobacco remaining on farms at the end of the season that had been produced in excess of 103 percent of the effective farm marketing quota has been moving into trade channels illegally.

“ASCS recently assessed marketing quota penalties in excess of \$30 million against tobacco dealers and warehouse operators for handling excess tobacco,” said Bjerke. “The primary source of this tobacco appears to be from producer carryover tobacco.”

Bjerke said producers are already required to report, at the close of each marketing season, the pounds of unmarketed tobacco on hand, its location and the pounds of unmarketed tobacco that is destroyed. “The amount of tobacco reported as destroyed has increased significantly in recent years,” he said.

Bjerke said the new reporting requirements exclude tobacco lost in the field as green tobacco; tobacco not harvested; scrap tobacco and tobacco leaves of poor quality that accumulate during preparation of tobacco for marketing.

“When the producer files a report an ASCS official will visit the farm and witness the disposition or destruction of the tobacco,” Bjerke said. “In addition, ASCS is adopting internal controls to detect producers who fail to report carryover tobacco remaining on the farm and will also conduct more on-site farm checks. These new rules may cause added burdens on some tobacco farmers but the problem is serious enough to warrant their adoption.”

Bjerke said producers that fail to account for production and disposition of tobacco on the farm or file false reports or false identification of tobacco are committing serious offenses. “Producers who violate tobacco program regulations are subject to criminal and civil action, in addition to farm allotment and quota reductions,” he said.

Producers should contact their county ASCS office for further information.

Bruce Merkle (202) 720-8206

USDA ANNOUNCES 1992 WOOL AND MOHAIR SUPPORT PRICES

WASHINGTON, June 26—The U.S. Department of Agriculture announced today that support prices for wool and mohair for 1992 marketings will be \$1.97 per pound for shorn wool and \$4.613 per pound for mohair.

Mohair is being supported at 85 percent of the percentage of parity at which shorn wool is being supported.

Wool on unshorn lambs will be supported, as in the past, at a level determined by a formula based on the hundredweight of live, unshorn lambs marketed.

Contact: Bruce Merkle, (202) 720-8206.
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59 WISCONSIN COUNTIES APPROVED FOR EMERGENCY HAYING OR GRAZING ON CRP ACREAGE

WASHINGTON, June 29—Secretary of Agriculture Edward Madigan announced today that due to extreme drought conditions in parts of Wisconsin, certain counties in the state have been approved for emergency haying or grazing of Conservation Reserve Program acreage.

Madigan said haying or grazing CRP acres will be allowed in 59 Wisconsin counties, which are those that have already been individually approved for USDA's livestock feed programs or emergency haying and grazing of Acreage Conservation Reserve and Conserving Use acreage.

"Because of the environmental objectives of the CRP we would prefer not to hay or graze these acres, but we are responding to an emergency situation with a cautious, prudent program," he said.

The approved counties are: Adams, Brown, Buffalo, Calumet, Chippewa, Clark, Columbia, Crawford, Dane, Dodge, Door, Florence, Fond du Lac, Forest, Grant, Green, Green Lake, Iowa, Jackson, Jefferson, Juneau, Kenosha, Kewaunee, La Crosse, Lafayette, Langlade, Lincoln, Marathon, Manitowoc, Marinette, Marquette, Menominee, Milwaukee, Monroe, Oconto, Oneida, Outagamie, Pepin, Pierce, Portage, Price, Racine, Richland, Rock, Rusk, Sauk, Shawano, Sheboygan, Taylor, Trempealeau, Vernon, Vilas, Walworth, Washington, Waukesha, Waupaca, Waushara, Winnebago and Wood.

"Any additional counties subsequently approved for livestock feed programs or ACR/CU haying and grazing will also be considered eligible for these emergency provisions," Madigan said.

The producer must first apply and be approved for haying or grazing on CRP acreage at the county office of USDA's Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service.

Madigan said either haying or grazing—but not both on the same acreage — will be allowed from June 26 through Sept. 30. All haying must be completed or livestock off the land by the end of the day on Sept. 30.

Only 75 percent of the acreage under contract may be hayed and only one cutting of hay will be allowed. The hay may be fed to the producer's own livestock or sold.

The entire acreage may be grazed but by only up to 75 percent of the normal stocking rate established by the Soil Conservation Service. Producers may graze their own stock or lease the acreage to other livestock owners subject to the same conditions.

Producers who elect to hay or graze their CRP acreage or lease the property for grazing under this allowance will have their CRP annual rental payment reduced. The reduction will be based on the value of forage that can be removed from the acreage, as determined by the county Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Committee.

Madigan emphasized that producers must contact their county ASCS office for full information and permission to participate in this emergency program before beginning to hay or graze in order to maintain CRP contract compliance.

Bruce Merkle (202) 720-8206

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FOREST SERVICE PREPARES FOR SEVERE FIRE SEASON

WASHINGTON, June 29—The Forest Service has added 70 smokejumpers, 11 small helicopters and 30 new fire crews to respond to a potentially severe fire season, the U.S. Department of Agriculture announced today.

“We also have alerted the Department of Defense, which has 2,000 personnel available plus a battalion of helicopters,” said F. Dale Robertson, USDA's Forest Service chief. “Fire conditions in the western United States are the worst since 1988.”

The conditions are poorest in states from the Pacific Coast to the Dakotas, including parts of Wyoming, Utah and Nevada, as well as the southern two-thirds of Florida.

Robertson cited several reasons for expecting an extreme fire season:
—Six years of drought in the western United States;

—Dead and dying timber that is disease- and insect-infested, brought about by the drought; and

—Below normal rainfall and snowpack.

Where the greatest threats to life and property exist, Forest Service personnel are alerting local communities and forest visitors to prepare for a long, dry fire season.

“The American people can help by being extremely careful with fire when in the forests and by quickly reporting fires they discover,” Robertson said.

“The worst fire season in recent history was 1988, when more than 150,000 wildfires burned over 7 million acres, an area larger than the state of Arizona,” Robertson said.

Judith Leraas (202) 205-1498

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USDA PROPOSES TO AMEND THE NATIONAL POULTRY IMPROVEMENT PLAN

WASHINGTON, June 29—The U.S. Department of Agriculture is proposing to amend the National Poultry Improvement Plan (NPIP) to increase the program’s effectiveness in preventing and controlling certain poultry diseases.

The proposed amendments provide new procedures for examining and testing participating flocks and would require that birds from sources not participating in the plan be isolated and tested before they are brought into a participating flock.

“Our proposal incorporates new scientific information and technologies that we believe will help improve poultry breeding stock and hatchery products,” said Billy G. Johnson, deputy administrator for veterinary services in USDA’s Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service.

The NPIP is a cooperative state-federal-industry program for preventing and controlling egg-transmitted, hatchery-disseminated poultry diseases. Participation is voluntary.

The plan identifies states, flocks, hatcheries and dealers that meet certain disease-control standards. As a result, customers can buy stock that has been tested and found free of certain diseases or that has been produced under disease-prevention conditions.

The proposed amendments are consistent with the recommendations approved by the voting delegates at the June 1990 meeting of the Biennial Plan Conference. Voting delegates are representatives of the poultry industry.

The proposal will be published in the June 30 Federal Register. Comments will be accepted if they are received on or before July 30. An original and three copies of written comments referring to docket 91-026 should be sent to Chief, Regulatory Analysis and Development, PPD, APHIS, USDA, Room 804 Federal Building, 6505 Belcrest Road, Hyattsville, Md. 20782.

Comments may be inspected at USDA, Room 1141-S, 14th St. and Independence Ave., S.W., Washington, D.C., between 8 a.m. and 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday, except holidays.

Sharon Scheidhauer (301) 436-7776

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SEVEN WASHINGTON COUNTIES APPROVED FOR HAYING OR GRAZING ON CRP ACRES

WASHINGTON, June 29—Secretary of Agriculture Edward Madigan announced today that, due to extreme drought conditions in parts of Washington, certain counties in the state have been approved for emergency haying or grazing of Conservation Reserve Program acreage.

Madigan said haying or grazing CRP acres will be allowed in seven Washington counties, which are those that already have been individually approved for USDA's livestock feed programs or emergency haying and grazing of Acreage Conservation Reserve and Conserving Use acreage.

The approved counties are: Asotin, Douglas, Lincoln, Okanogan, Spokane, Stevens and Whitman.

"Any additional counties subsequently approved for livestock feed programs or ACR/CU haying and grazing will also be considered eligible for these emergency provisions," Madigan said.

Producers must first apply and be approved for haying or grazing on CRP acreage at the county office of USDA's Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service.

Madigan said either haying or grazing—but not both on the same acreage—will be allowed from June 25 through Sept. 30. All haying must be completed or livestock removed from the land by the end of the day on Sept. 30.

Only 75 percent of the acreage under contract may be hayed and only one cutting of hay will be allowed. The hay may be fed to the producer's own livestock or sold.

The entire acreage may be grazed but by only up to 75 percent of the normal stocking rate established by the Soil Conservation Service. Producers may graze their own stock or lease the acreage to other livestock owners

subject to the same conditions.

Producers who elect to hay or graze their CRP acreage or lease the property for grazing under this allowance will have their CRP annual rental payment reduced. The reduction will be based on the value of forage that can be removed from the acreage, as determined by the county Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Committee.

Madigan emphasized that producers must contact their county ASCS office for full information and permission to participate in this emergency program before beginning to hay or graze in order to maintain CRP contract compliance.

Bruce Merkle (202) 720-8206

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STORAGE PAYMENTS RESUME FOR FARMER-OWNED-RESERVE WHEAT

WASHINGTON, June 29—The U.S. Department of Agriculture announced that beginning today storage payments will resume on wheat in the Farmer-Owned- Reserve.

Keith Bjerke, executive vice president of USDA's Commodity Credit Corporation, said, "This will not limit producers ability to market wheat in the FOR at their discretion."

Storage payments were stopped Jan. 28 as required by law, since the 5-day moving average price of the classes of wheat in the FOR was at least 95 percent (\$3.80 per bushel) of the wheat established target price. The law also requires that the nonstorage earning period continue until prices have been below the storage-stop trigger level for more than 90 consecutive days.

Payments are 26.5 cents per bushel, per year, paid at the end of each quarter.

The last day the wheat market price equaled or exceeded 95 percent of the wheat target price was March 30. Therefore, yesterday was the end of the nonstorage earning period.

Bruce Merkle (202) 720-8206

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EXTENSION'S EFFORTS IN THE INNER CITY

Although much of Los Angeles burned during the riots, Extension's Common Ground projects stood untouched.

In one neighborhood, a Common Ground urban garden continued to grow, a sign of new life—and hope—amid burning rubble. The question is, why wasn't the garden destroyed? The answer could be that Common Ground garden projects nurture a community's sense of well-being.

Common Ground garden projects teaches participants to produce and use vegetables to improve diet, and daily nutrition. "People take pride in their ownership of these projects and protect them as anyone protects what is theirs," said Rick Gomez, Extension Service, National Program Leader for the Urban Gardening Program.

Through innovative community-based programs, Extension efforts like Common Ground continue to make a noticeable difference in many of our Nation's inner cities.

In Los Angeles more than 20,000 individuals have participated in gardens, workshops, and school projects since Common Ground began in 1977.

"During this time fresh vegetables with a retail value of almost \$4 million were made available to families who otherwise could not afford them," said George Rendell, Regional Director, Los Angeles County Extension.

"About 70 percent of Common Ground's participants are low income residents of our county," said Los Angeles County Extension Specialist, Brenda Funches.

According to Rendell, since its inception Common Ground has established more than 100 community vegetable gardens, most of these on private parcels scattered throughout the city of Los Angeles.

Currently, the program operates 17 community and 30 school gardening projects, benefiting 450 families, including nearly 2,500 children. Each year, through workshops and special activities, Common Ground provides services to 1,500 others.

"The program teaches people to produce and use vegetables to improve diet, and daily nutrition," Funches said.

Nationwide, there are 23 urban gardening programs in cities such as New York, Philadelphia, St. Louis, Detroit, and Atlanta.

The Common Ground concept of community concern proves that people respect and appreciate programs that offer them a stake in the process of change.

CHICAGO'S YOUTH AT RISK PROGRAM

A Chicago teen mother of two small children is faced with the real possibility of having to drop out of leaving school. She turns to an Extension

program for help.

Through the ES Parent Readiness Education Program (PREP), she finds a licensed child care provider. She receives tuition and transportation assistance.

This teen mother didn't become another dropout statistic. She remained in school, choosing a career along the way. In reality this hypothetical case history represents the real life cases of 183 pregnant and parenting teens who participated in PREP during 1990/91.

"PREP targets low-income teen mothers and provides them with education and information in parenting, budgeting, job hunting, career awareness, and so much more," said Illinois Extension staff member Karen Greene.

A collaborative effort like most Extension programs, PREP is funded by the Illinois State Board of Education, Department of Adult Vocational and Technical Education.

"This program teaches low-income single mothers how to be responsible parents and how to become self-sufficient adults," Greene said.

PREP and other programs are part of a nationwide Extension effort called Youth at Risk.

The Youth at Risk Initiative focuses on youth ages 5 through 14 and their parents. It involves them in positive activities, leading them away from negative ones.

One key to Extension's Youth at Risk agenda is 4-H participation by inner city youth. "4-H helps inner city youth learn how to become productive, responsible, healthy people," said Jon E. Irby, Extension's Co-Leader for the ES Youth at Risk Initiative Team.

In Chicago, Extension's Youth at Risk program assists inner city youth in overcoming adversity. By helping to develop knowledge, skills and positive attitudes, Extension provides many inner city youth with an alternative to alcohol, drugs, and gangs. NEW YORK CITY

In New York City an innovative idea is coupled with an Extension program already in place.

Increasing numbers of Spanish speaking people are moving to New York. The Hispanic population has grown 24 percent recently. Many of these residents do not read or write well. This makes it difficult for them to find employment, attend school, or buy labeled goods in neighborhood stores, among other things.

Through collaboration with other government agencies, private organizations and the Harlem community, New York Extension introduced a program called the Literacy Through Nutrition Project.

This program develops the reading and writing skills of low-income youth and families in Central Harlem, while providing nutrition education.

"When staffers met with participants in our Expanded Food and Nutrition

Education Program (EFNEP), a lot of residents were not stating directly that they could not read or write,” said Nilda Tirado, citywide Director of New York Extension’s EFNEP program. “They’d say things like they’ve lost their glasses.”

“Since people are comfortable with EFNEP, we saw this as a perfect way to promote reading and writing skills,” Tirado said.

This New York Extension program, like Extension programs nationwide, employs professional food and nutrition experts. These experts train and supervise paraprofessionals and volunteers who teach food and nutrition information and skills in a targeted community. With some additional training, the Nutrition Teaching Assistants (NTAs) working in Harlem are able to address literacy as well.

Most of Harlem’s NTAs are recruited from the community. They know the people and the people know them. “Not everyone can do this job,” Tirado said. “It takes someone who knows the neighborhood, especially in an area where trust is not easily awarded.”

“In New York we have a people-based program that takes into consideration the special needs and situations of people,” said Ruth Allen, Director of Cornell Cooperative Extension Service, New York City Programs. “We try to fit the program to the audience rather than the reverse,” she said.

According to Wells Willis, Extension’s EFNEP National Program Leader, 50 percent of EFNEP programs are focused in central urban areas. Since it began more than 20 years ago, EFNEP has helped more than 10 million people.

These are just three examples of the many community-based Extension programs that are helping people in urban areas. For more information on Extension programs in your city, contact your state or county Extension office. Check under state or county government in your local telephone directory for the listing.

Charles Morgan (202) 690-3656
Issued: June 29, 1992

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BUSH ANNOUNCES CREDIT GUARANTEES TO RUSSIA FOR PURCHASE OF U.S. AG PRODUCTS

WASHINGTON, June 30—President Bush today announced the U.S. Department of Agriculture will make available on or about July 1 \$300 million in credit guarantees to the Russian Federation for the purchase of U.S. agricultural products.

These export credits will be awarded through USDA's GSM-102 Export Credit Guarantee Program, under which USDA's Commodity Credit Corporation guarantees commercial credit extended to recipient nations to finance purchases of agricultural commodities produced in the United States. Originally the Russian Federation had been scheduled to be awarded \$150 million in GSM credit guarantees around July 1, and another \$150 million around Aug. 1.

"We are accelerating availability of the guarantees in direct response to Russian Federation President Boris Yeltsin's request for the credit availability to be moved up," said Secretary of Agriculture Edward Madigan.

On April 1, President Bush announced the United States would make available during fiscal 1992 up to \$1.1 billion in GSM credit guarantees to former republics of the Soviet Union, \$600 million of which would be for Russia. The credits announced today complete Russia's part of that package.

USDA soon will issue the specific mix of U.S. commodities eligible to be purchased under today's announcement.

Roger Runningen (202) 720-4623

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FGIS PUBLISHES NEW MOISTURE METER CHARTS

WASHINGTON, July 1—The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Federal Grain Inspection Service has published revised conversion charts for the Motomco Model 919 Moisture Meter. The revisions correct statistical biases that became apparent during the agency's scheduled review of the charts.

New moisture meter charts are being implemented for: Six-rowed barley (chart H-1-92, effective 6/1/92), Hard White wheat (chart W-7-92, effective 6/1/92), corn (chart C-1-92, effective 7/1/92), high-moisture corn (chart C-2-92, effective 7/1/92), and Medium Grain Rough rice (chart RR-2-92, effective 7/1/92).

In addition, the existing charts for White wheat (Eastern White Wheat and Western White Wheat) were reprinted with new titles (Soft White Wheat—Eastern Production and Soft White Wheat—Western Production, respectively) to avoid confusion with the new Hard White wheat chart.

The new charts should be used for all official inspections performed on or after their effective dates.

The Motomco Model 919 Moisture Meter is the officially approved instrument for testing moisture in grains.

For technical information, contact James Rampton, FGIS Quality Assurance and Research Division, (816) 374-6518 or (816) 891-8070.

Contact: Dana Stewart, (202) 720-5091.

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CCC INTEREST RATE FOR JULY 4 1/4 PERCENT

WASHINGTON, July 1—Commodity loans disbursed in July by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Commodity Credit Corporation will carry a 4 1/4 percent interest rate, according to Keith Bjerke, executive vice president of the CCC.

The 4 1/4 percent interest rate remains the same as June's 4 1/4 percent and the reflects the interest rate charged CCC by the U.S. Treasury in June.

Kimberly D. Somerville (202) 720-6787

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